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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000712

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/MARCHESE/HARDING

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/21/2027  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: HAMADEH, MURR ON TRIPOLI FIGHTS; SEEKING  
ACCELERATION OF MILITARY ASSISTANCE

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In a 5/21 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of Communications Marwan Hamadeh and Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Elias Murr (who joined the conversation by speaker phone from Switzerland) previewed what they predicted would be the conclusions of the cabinet meeting being held tonight (5/21) to discuss the battles with Fatah al-Islam in and around Tripoli. Hamadeh and Murr reported that careful shuttle diplomacy between the ministers and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) Commander Michel Sleiman throughout the course of today resulted in the following proposals which Hamadeh and Murr expected the cabinet to approve:

-- Full green light for the LAF (and, as appropriate, the Internal Security Forces) to use whatever means necessary to secure the perimeter of the Nahr al-Barid Palestinian refugee camp and to cordon off the camp.

-- Full green light for the LAF (and ISF) to return fire, massively if the LAF chooses, if fired upon from the camp.

-- Request by the Prime Minister to donor countries to accelerate their assistance to the LAF and ISF.

-- Increase in recruitment for the LAF.

-- Day of mourning declared for the 27 LAF soldiers and officers killed.

-- Indemnities paid to the survivors of the LAF killed, equivalent to the indemnities paid to survivors of LAF and ISF members killed during last summer's war with Israel.

¶2. (C) The cabinet will not, Hamadeh and Murr said, authorize the LAF to enter physically the camp. While some ministers are likely to advocate such a move, the LAF itself is not prepared. Entering the camp, home to up to 40,000 Palestinians, could result in a civilian massacres that could ignite fighting in Lebanon's 11 other refugee camps. The army could not handle multiple battles simultaneously, especially given lack of ammunition. Politically, as Hamadeh said, "Fouad (Siniora) can't look like an Israeli and expect to survive." So the cabinet, Murr predicted, will give the LAF full authority to "squeeze" the camp and to return fire, but any decision to enter the camp will be put off for now. "We can always look at this question again later," Hamadeh said.

¶3. (C) Murr said that the main reason he concurs with postponing a decision to enter the camp at this time is because he does not feel that the LAF is properly equipped

for such an assault. He noted that one of the LAF's goals (that will fall within the cabinet's anticipated green light) is to take out the Fatah al-Islam outposts on the camp perimeter, along the beach. But the LAF does not have gunboats that could fire on these outposts from the sea. Nor does the LAF have helicopter-based weapons systems, meaning that the LAF has no air assault power. "We've been asking you for these things," Murr said; "now you see why we need them." Claiming that Fatah al-Islam has more heavy weaponry than the LAF, Hamadeh said that he hoped, when the PM is asked by the cabinet to request accelerated delivery of assistance to the LAF, the USG will be quick to respond.

¶4. (C) The Ambassador asked Murr and Hamadeh what evidence they had for the Syrian connections both saw behind Fatah al-Islam. Hamadeh said that one of the Fatah al-Islam fighters killed on 5/20 was named Saddam Abbas Deeb. The GOL knows that he was brought to Lebanon six months ago by Syria-allied Sunni figure Fathi Yaqin. Murr said that he would brief the Ambassador more fully in person as to why he was convinced Syria, as well as al-Qaida, was involved.

¶5. (C) Comment: If anyone doubted that the LAF would fight Sunni extremists in the north, the drama of the last two days has proven otherwise. We calculate that there is, in fact, popular support for the LAF to enter Nahr al-Barid, given the outrage over the death of 27 LAF soldiers and officers yesterday. But the cabinet does not yet seem ready for that political decision, and the LAF does not seem ready for the battle that would ensue. The lack of equipment and supplies is a serious problem: we estimate that the LAF has already used more than 10 percent of its entire stock of tank rounds (which were only 600 rounds at the beginning of this fight). With only 800 rounds to its name of 120 mm mortars, the LAF

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could exhaust its mortar supply after only a few days' fighting. Thus, the fear of the fighting spreading to other Palestinian camps is not an irrational worry, given the LAF's inability to sustain for long the use of firepower expended over the last two days. We are working through ODC to see if the USG is able to accelerate any of its anticipated deliveries to give the LAF a morale boost and greater fighting power.

FELTMAN